

Beasley's Christmas Party

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

SYNOPSIS

PART I.—Newcomer in a small town, a young newspaper man, who tells the story, is amazed by the unsocialable actions of a man who, from the window of a fine house, apparently has a conversation with invisible persons, particularly mentioning one "Simpledora." The young man goes to his boarding house, the home of Mrs. Apperthwaite, next door to the scene of the strange proceedings, bewildered.

PART II.—Next morning he discovers his strange neighbor is the Hon. David Beasley, prominent politician, and only one who is respected. Feeling of his last night's experience, he is markedly interested by a fellow boarder, a Mr. George Dowden. Later, with Miss Apperthwaite, he is an unseen witness of a purely imaginary jumping contest between Beasley and a "Bill Hammersey." Miss Apperthwaite appears deeply concerned, there apparently being no possible explanation of the strange proceedings.

PART III.—The reporter learns that Beasley and Miss Apperthwaite had at one time been engaged, and that the young lady had broken the engagement because of Beasley's "lack of imagination."

PART IV.—The "mystery" of "Simpledora" and "Bill Hammersey" is explained by Mr. Dowden. Beasley is carrying for a small boy, Hamilton Swift, Junior, a helpless invalid bodily though more than ordinarily bright mentally, the son of dear friends who are dead and "Simpledora" and "Bill Hammersey" are figures of Beasley's and the small boy's imagination. Beasley humors the little sufferer by the "play acting."

PART V.—The reporter becomes acquainted with David Beasley, who is invited to his home, where he meets Hamilton Swift, Junior, and his circle of "invisible," which Beasley and George Dowden have made very real to the child.

And now, shifting my eyes from the stinging wind, I saw what I had been too blind to see as we approached Mrs. Apperthwaite's. Beasley's house was illuminated; every window, up stairs and down, was aglow with rosy light. That was luminously evident, although the shades, or most of them, were lowered.

"Look at that!" Peck turned to Dowden, giggling triumphantly. "What'd I tell you! How do you feel about it now?"

"But where are the cabs?" asked Dowden, gravely.

"Pohs! all come," answered Mr. Peck, with complete assurance. "Won't be no more cabs till they begin to go home."

We plunged ahead as far as the corner of Beasley's fence, where Peck stopped us again, and we drew to ether, slapping our hands and stamping our feet. Peck was delighted—a thoroughly happy man; his sour giggle of exaltation had become continuous, and the same jovial break was audible in Grist's voice as he said to the Journal reporter and me:

"Go ahead, boys. Git your story. We'll wait here for you."

The Journal reporter started toward the gate; he had gone, perhaps twenty feet when Simeon Peck whistled in sharp warning. The reporter stopped short in his tracks.

Beasley's front door was thrown open, and there stood Beasley himself in evening dress, bowing and smiling, but not at us, for he did not see us. The bright hall behind him was beautiful with overgreen streamers and wreaths, and great flowering plants in jars. A strain of dance-music wandered out to us as the door opened, but there was nobody except David Beasley in sight, which certainly seemed peculiar for a ball!

"That of 'em inside, dancin'," explained Mr. Peck, crouching behind the picket-fence. "It'll be the house is more'n half full o' low-necked wimmin!"

"Sh!" said Grist. "Listen to Dave Beasley."

Beasley had begun to speak, and his voice, loud and clear, sounded over the wind. "Come right in, Colonel!" he said. "I'd have sent a cab for you if you hadn't telephoned me this afternoon that your rheumatism was so bad you didn't expect to be able to come. I'm glad you're well again. Yes, they're all here, and the ladies are getting up a dance in the sitting-room."

(It was at this moment that I received upon the calf of the right leg a kick, the ecstatic violence of which led me to attribute it, and rightly, to Mr. Dowden.)

"Gentlemen's dressing-room upstairs to the right, Colonel," called Beasley, as he closed the door.

There was a pause of awed silence among us.

(I improved it by returning the kick to Mr. Dowden. He made no acknowledgment of its reception other than to sink his chin a little deeper into the collar of his ulster.)

"By the Almighty!" said Simeon Peck, hoarsely. "Who—what was Dave Beasley talkin' to? There wasn't nobody there!"

"Git out," Grist bade him; but his tone was perturbed. "He seen that reporter. He was givin' us the laugh."

across his knee, wiped his face with a new and brilliant blue silk handkerchief, and said:

"Now come de big speech."

The Honorable David Beasley, carrying a small mahogany table, stepped out from beyond the Christmas tree, advanced to the center of the room; set the table down; disappeared for a moment and returned with a white water-pitcher and a glass. He placed these upon the table, bowed gracefully several times, then spoke:

"Ladies and gentlemen—! There he pau ed."

"Well," said Mr. Simeon Peck, slowly, "don't this bear hell!"

"Look out!" The Journal reporter twitched his sleeve. "Ladies present."

"Where?" said I.

He leaned nearer me and spoke in a low tone.

"Just behind us. She followed us over from your boarding house. She's been standing around near us all along. I supposed she was Dowden's daughter, probably."

"He hasn't any daughter," I said, and stepped back to the hooded figure I had been too absorbed in our quest to notice.

It was Miss Apperthwaite.

She had thrown a loose cloak over her head and shoulders; but enveloped in it as she was, and crested and emulated with white, I knew her at once. There was no mistaking her, even in a blizzard.

She caught my hand with a strong, quick pressure, and bending her head to mine, said in a soft whisper, close to my ear:

"I heard everything that man said in our hallway. You left the library door open when you called Mr. Dowden out."

"So," I returned, maliciously, "you couldn't help following!"

She released my hand—gently, to my surprise.

"Hush," she whispered. "He's saying something."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Beasley again—and stopped again.

Dowden's voice sounded hysterically in my right ear. (Miss Apperthwaite had whispered in my left.) "The only speech he's ever made in his life—and he's stuck!"

But Beasley wasn't; he was only deliberating.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began—

"Mr. and Mrs. Hunchberg, Colonel Hunchberg and Aunt Cooley Hunchberg, Miss Molanna, Miss Queen, and Miss Maribee Hunchberg. Mr. Noble, Mr. Tom, and Mr. Grandee Hunchberg,

Mr. Carley Linbidge, and Master Hammersey.—You see before you tonight, in my person, merely the representative of your real host, Mister Swift. Mister Swift has expressed a wish that there should be a speech, and has deputed me to make it. He requests that the subject he has assigned me should be treated in as dignified a manner as is possible—considering the orator. Ladies and gentlemen—he took a sip of water—"I will now address you upon the following subject: 'Why We Call Christmas Time the Best Time.'"

"Christmas time is the best time because it is the kindest time. Nobody ever felt very happy without feeling very kind, and nobody ever felt very kind without feeling at least a little happy. So, of course, either way about, the happiest time is the kindest time—that's this time. The most beautiful things our eyes can see are the stars; and for that reason, and in remembrance of One star, we set candles on the Tree to be stars in the house. So we make Christmas time a time of stars indoors; and they shine warmly against the cold outdoors that is like the cold of other seasons not so kind. We set our hundred candles on the Tree and keep them bright throughout the Christmas time, for while they shine upon us we have light to see this life, not as a battle, but as the march of a mighty Fellowship! Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you!"

He bowed to right and left, as to an audience politely applauding, and lifting the table and its burden, withdrew; while old Bob again set his fiddle to his chin and started to scrape the preliminary measure of a quadrille. Beasley was back in an instant, shouting as he came: "Take your partners! Balance all!"

And then there, and all by himself, he danced a quadrille, performing at one and the same time for four lively couples. Never in my life have I seen such gyrations and capers as were cut by that long-legged, loose-

jointed, miraculously flying figure. He was in the wildest motion without cessation, never the fraction of an instant still; calling the figures at the top of his voice and dancing them simultaneously; his expression anxious but polite (as is the habit of other dancers); his hands extended as if to swing his partner or corner, or "opposite lady;" and his feet lifting high and flapping down in an old-fashioned step.

"First four, forward and back!" he shouted. "Forward and salute! Balance to corners! Swing partners! Ger-rand Right and Left!"

I think the combination of abandon and decorum with which he performed that "Grand Right-and-Left" was the funniest thing I have ever seen. But I didn't laugh at it.

Neither did Miss Apperthwaite, at my side.

"Now do you believe me?" Peck was arguing, fiercely, with Mr. Schulmeyer. "Is he crazy, or ain't he?"

"He is," Grist agreed, hoarsely. "He is a stark, starin', ravin', roarin' lunatic! And the nigger's humerin' him!"

They were all staring, open-mouthed and agape, into the lighted room.

"Do you see where it puts us?" Simeon Peck's rasping voice rose high.

"I guess I do!" said Grist. "We come out to buy a barn, and got a horse and lot for the same money. It's the greatest night's work you ever done, Sim Peck!"

"I guess it is!"

"Shake on it, Sim."

They shook hands, exalted with triumph.

"This'll do the work," giggled Peck. "It's about two-thousand per cent better than the story we started to git. Why, Dave Beasley'll be in a padded cell in a month! It'll be all over town tomorrow, and he'll have as much chance for governor as that nigger in there!" In his ecstasy he smote Dowden deliciously in the ribs. "What do you think of your candidate now?"

"Wait," said Dowden. "Who came in the cabs that Grist saw?"

This staggered Mr. Peck. He rubbed his mitten over his swollen eye as if scratching his head. "Why," he said, slowly—"who in Halifax did come in them cabs?"

"The Hunchbergs? Where—"

"Listen," said Dowden.

"First couple, face out!" shouted Beasley, facing out with an invisible lady on his akimbo arm, while old Bob bowed madly at "A New Cown in Town."

"Second couple, fall in!" Beasley wheeled about and enacted the second couple.

"Third couple!" He fell in behind himself again.

"Fourth couple, if you please! Balance—ALL—I beg your pardon, Miss Molanna, I'm afraid I stepped on your train.—Sashay All!"

After the "sashay"—the noblest and most dashing bit of gymnastics displayed in the whole quadrille—he bowed profoundly to his invisible partner and came to a pause, wiping his streaming face. Old Bob dexterously swung a "A New Cown" into the stately measures of a triumphal march.

"And now," Beasley announced, in stentorian tones, "if the ladies will be so kind as to take the gentlemen's arms, we will proceed to the dining room and partake of a slight collation."

Thereupon came a slender piping of joy from that part of the room which had been screened from us by the Tree.

"Oh, Cousin David Beasley, that was the beautifullest quadrille ever danced in the world! And now, please, won't you take Mrs. Hunchberg out to supper?"

Then into the vision of our paralyzed and dumfounded watchers came the little wagon, pulled by the old colored woman, Bob's wife, in her best, and there, propped upon pillows, lay Hamilton Swift, Junior, his soul shining rapture out of his great eyes, a bright spot of color on each of his thin cheeks.

He lifted himself on one elbow, and for an instant something seemed to be wrong with the brace which was under his chin.

Beasley sprang to him and adjusted it tenderly. Then he bowed elaborately toward the mantel-piece.

"Mrs. Hunchberg," he said, "may I have the honor?" And offered his arm.

"And I must have Mister Hunch-

berg walk with me."

"He tells me," said Grist, "he'll be mighty glad to. And here's a plate of bones for Simpledora."

"You lead the way," cried the chad; "you and Mrs. Hunchberg."

"Are we all in line?" Beasley glanced back over his shoulder. "Hooray! Now, let us on. Ho! Music there!"

"Dr-r-r-r-r!" applauded Mister Swift.

And Beasley, his head thrown back and his chest out, proudly led the way, stepping nobly and in time to the ex-



"You Lead the Way," Cried the Child; "You and Mrs. Hunchberg."

hilarating measures. Hamilton Swift, Junior, toiled by the heaving old mummy, followed in his wagon, his thin little arm uplifted and his fingers curled as if they held a trusted hand.

When they reached the door, old Bob rose, turned in after them, and, still fiddling, played the procession and himself down the hall.

And so they marched away, and we were left staring into the empty room.

"My soul!" said the Journal reporter, gasping. "And he did all that—just to please a little sick kid!"

"I can't figure it out," murmured Sim Peck, piteously.

"I can," said the Journal reporter. "This story will be all over town tomorrow. He glanced at me, and I nodded. 'It'll be all over town,' he continued, 'though not in any of the papers—and I don't believe it's going to hurt Dave Beasley's chances any.'"

Mr. Peck and his companions turned toward the street and went silently.

The young man from the Journal overtook them. "Thank you for sending for me," he said, cordially. "You've given me a treat. I'm for Beasley!"

Dowden put his hand on my shoulder. He had not observed the third figure still remaining.

"Well, sir," he remarked, shaking the snow from his coat, "they were right about one thing: it certainly was mighty low down of Dave not to invite me—and you, too—to his Christmas party. Let him go to thunder with his old invitations, I'm going in, anyway! Come on. I'm plum froze."

There was a side door just beyond the bay window, and Dowden went to it and rang, loud and long. It was Beasley himself who opened it.

"What in the name—" he began, as the ruddy light fell upon Dowden's face and upon me, standing a little way behind.

"What are you two snow-banks? What on earth are you fellows doing out here?"

"We've come to your Christmas party, you old horse-thief!" Thus Mr. Dowden.

"Hoo-ray!" said Beasley. Dowden turned to me. "Aren't you coming?"

"What are you waiting for, old fellow?" said Beasley.

I waited a moment longer, and then it happened.

She came out of the shadow and went to the foot of the steps, her cloak falling from her shoulders as she passed me. I picked it up.

She lifted her arms pleadingly, though her head was bent with what seemed to me a beautiful sort of shame. She stood there with the snow driving against her and did not speak. Beasley drew his hand slowly across his eyes—to see if they were really there, I think.

"David," she said, at last. "You've got so many lovely people in your house tonight, isn't there room for— for just one fool? It's Christmas time!"

(THE END.)

Close Communion.

"You say the play was gripping?" "It was. There were two clinches in the first act, three in the second and in the last act the heroine spent approximately 20 minutes in the hero's arms."

Left A Million; Works!

Elizabeth, N. J.—"Seeing is believing," is an axiom to which Eugene Berne, 63 year old street cleaner intends to cling while reports flourish that his wife's brother, Michael Kelly, real estate operator, has died in Kansas, leaving \$1,000,000 to them. Berne says he will continue to ply the brush until he has the money in hand.

Sunday School Lesson

(By REV. P. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Teacher of English Bible in the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)

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LESSON FOR DECEMBER 24

A LESSON IN TRUST AND PREPAREDNESS

LESSON TEXT—Luke 12:13-40. **GOLDEN TEXT**—The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. —Luke 12:22.

PRIMARILY TOPIC—The Story of a Foolish Rich Man.

SECONDARY TOPIC—A Foolish Rich Man.

INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—Rich Toward God.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—True Riches.

Since on October 8 we had a lesson on the birth and childhood of Jesus, many will doubtless prefer to have this new lesson instead of the Christmas lesson.

I. A Warning Against Covetousness (vv. 13-21).

1. The Occasion (vv. 13-15). One of the company requested Jesus to be umpire in a disputed estate. Two brothers were in trouble over an inheritance. Christ refused to enter the sphere of the civil law and warned against the spirit of avarice. Christ's mission was preeminently spiritual.

2. Enforcement of the Warning (vv. 16-21). The parable of the rich man shows clearly that to be concerned with earthly riches while neglecting God is the height of folly. The Lord's warning is of great importance today; for many are seeking gold and forgetting God. Note (1) his increase in goods (v. 16). His riches were rightly obtained, for the ground brought forth plentifully. This shows that a man may be rich because of the Lord's blessing upon him. (2) His perplexity (v. 17). His land was producing more than his barns would hold. He did not want it to go to waste. If he had possessed the right views of life and a sense of stewardship before God, he would have seen that his barns at least had enough for his personal needs and that he could have distributed his surplus to the needy and for benevolent purposes. (3) The fatal choice (vv. 18, 19). He chose to enlarge his barns and give up his life to ease and luxury. It ought to be a delightful task for men whom God has made rich to devote their time and energy to the distribution of their possessions to benevolent purposes. (4) The awful indictment (vv. 20, 21). God calls him a fool.

II. The Certain Cure for Anxiety (vv. 22-34).

Having shown the folly of the rich man who gained gold but lost God, He now urged the disciples to trust God and dismiss all anxious care. He assured them that they need not be anxious even for the necessities of life. Note:

1. The Argument (vv. 22, 23). This is summed up in one brief sentence: "The life is more than food, and the body is more than raiment." The God who gave the life and made the body should be trusted to provide food and clothing.

2. The Illustrations (vv. 24-28). (1) God's care for the fowls (vv. 24-25). The ravens do not sow nor reap—they have not storehouse or barn, yet they live, for God feeds them. If God does not forget the fowls, certainly He would do more for His children. (2) God's care for the flowers of the field (vv. 27, 28). If God is so careful of those flowers which appear but for a day, how much more will He clothe His children!

3. The Exhortations (vv. 29-34). (1) Make not the getting of food and clothes your chief concern. Trust God to provide them. (2) Seek the kingdom of God (v. 31). Those who make God's kingdom first shall have all their needs supplied (Phil. 4:19). (3) Be not afraid (v. 32). God's good pleasure is upon His own, and all good things will He give them. (4) Practice self-denial in order to be able to give gifts to those in need (vv. 33, 34). The doing of such deeds will tend to lift the thoughts upward to God—to trust Him.

III. Be Ready for the Coming of the Lord (vv. 35-40).

Having warned the disciples against the acquisition of worldly goods while forgetting God, and shown them the needlessness of anxiety for food and clothes, He shows them the blessedness of being in a state of readiness when the Lord shall come. Conviction as to the certainty of the Lord's coming is the sure cure for worldliness and anxious care. This attitude of heart He made clear by two parables—that of the returning of the Lord and that of the thief. The Lord will be so pleased with those who are waiting for Him that He will take delight in sitting at the banquet with them, and even serve them. The parable of the thief shows that the time of the Lord's coming is not known.

Paul's Wish.

I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.—Philippians 3:8-11.

So Many Ravens.

The Lord never had so many ravens as he has this morning.—T. De Witt Talmage.

God is Known Everywhere.

In Judah is God known; His name is great in Israel.—Psalm 76:1.



Opposite the Tree, via Back Against the Wall, Sat Old Bob.

and what delectable enticements. Opposite the Tree, his back against the wall, sat old Bob, clad in a dress of state, part of which consisted of a swallow-tail coat (with an overgrown chrysanthemum in the buttonhole), a red necktie, and a pink-and-silver liberty cap of tissue-paper. He was scraping a fiddle "like old times come again," and the tune he played was, "Oh, my Liza, po' gal!" My feet shuffled to it in the snow.

No one except old Bob was to be seen in the room, but we watched him and listened breathlessly. When he finished, "Liza," he laid the fiddle

Ask Anyone

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